



CASE STUDY



City of Calgary, Canada

Client:

Department of Development & Building Approvals, City of Calgary, Alberta

Business Challenge:

Creation of an integrated online subdivision and development application process – ePlans.

Solution:

POSSE, POSSE Internet, Livelink, Adobe

Industry:

Public Sector – Municipal Government

"The greatest benefit to our company (and our clients) is the ability to track the progress of our plans/applications as they circulate through the various departments at the City." – Engineering Consultant

Summary

The City of Calgary (pop. 1 million) is the largest city in the province of Alberta, Canada. The City has experienced record-breaking growth and development over the last decade. Alberta's strong economy continues to fuel immense real estate growth through new businesses and individuals moving to Calgary, or local businesses and residents relocating within the City. In order to meet the demands of servicing developers and managing residential lot inventory while still maintaining quality service levels, the City embraced available technology to help them meet the challenge of demanding growth.

POSSE has been in use at the City since 1998 in a variety of business areas. The Department of Development and Building Approvals reconfigured and modified existing POSSE workflows and integrated POSSE with other systems to meet the new business requirements and deliver the ePlans solution via the City's website to the development community.

The first phase of ePlans was delivered in early 2005 with the implementation of electronic submission of conforming subdivision applications and conforming plans for endorsement. The system allows applicants to submit applications over the Internet and to also review the circulation and review status of the application during the City's approval process.

Project Goals

1. The City and Department desired to do more business on the Web (e-business)
2. Efficiencies were required in the Department as a cost recoverable business unit
3. Improve the cycle times for the processing of subdivision applications and track performance against agreed targets

Improvement of related subdivision processes was a key business driver for the first phase of ePlans. The target was to reduce the processing time of conforming tentative plans submitted via ePlans by 35 per cent, or by 40 days.

Methodology

The City of Calgary uses the SMART project management methodology. A SMART project charter was developed which included the following milestones:

1. Plan
2. Research & Analyze
3. Design
4. Build
5. Test and Train
6. Rollout and Retrain
7. Continuous Improvement and Sustainment

ePlans was developed with a customer-focused approach. During the design phase of ePlans, customers who accounted for a significant portion of the subdivision applications in Calgary were engaged to be part of the design. This partnership with the customer helped ensure a customer-centric and user-friendly application design. At each subsequent phase, customers were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the system design.

The testing and training phase involved a "beta" launch of the system to the customers/partners who were involved in the design of ePlans. This allowed them to submit real applications into the City's production system but also allowed them to contact ePlans staff directly in the event problems were encountered. This pre-launch approach helped mitigate the risk associated with an implementation of this size.

The original system design was to provide the electronic submission of the plans as part of the implementation. Changes were made to the existing POSSE workflow for deployment to the Internet. In order to accommodate the performance reporting requirements, additional changes were made to allow for the proper measurement of customer time and City staff time. These changes also include the design of a data warehouse to allow staff to analyze process information and identify areas for improvement and root cause analysis.



Success Factors

Technology Benefits

ePlans integrates a number of commercially available technologies, including POSSE® for workflow management, Livelink for document management, Adobe Acrobat and AutoVue for electronic review, markup and stamp of subdivision plans, and Smart Boards for team review and markup of subdivision plans.

ePlans is 100 per cent electronic. Any subdivision application submitted via ePlans is retained as an electronic file. No paper file exists and the official document of record for the application is stored in the enterprise document management system.

ePlans improves the quality of incoming applications by ensuring that applicants have all mandatory information and documentation prior to submitting an application.

ePlans provides an open process where owners and applicants (not always the same individuals) can review the status of their applications.

ePlans measures performance. One of the components of ePlans was the development of both applicant and City staff-balanced scorecards. The system captures and measures performance metrics which are shared with both the applicants and City staff in a continuous improvement feedback loop.

ePlans is a reusable framework for other similar initiatives. ePlans was designed to be a modular framework which could be easily applied to other application types.

ePlans is a "pillar" in the City's movement to provide services to customers over the Internet. Additionally, the associated business process mapping is a key foundation for knowledge retention in a retiring workforce.

Stakeholder Benefits

Customers:

1. Improved turnaround time for new plan circulation and approvals.
2. Convenience – Ability to submit plans electronically, reducing visits and calls to City Hall, saving time and money.
3. Reduced printing costs as plans are submitted digitally.
4. Ability to see status of applications in real-time without having to call City Hall, increasing transparency in City processes.

Department:

1. Reduced storage space costs for paper records and reduced mailing costs.
2. Increased customer service deliverables. Customers are able to apply for and query the status of their submissions online 24/7, decreasing direct staff contact.
3. Accessibility to data without waiting for paper circulation.
4. Versions of files are managed electronically. Plans can be tracked and accessed quickly and reliably.
5. Improved timelines for circulation and approvals, resulting in better turnaround for customers awaiting approvals.
6. Ability to track the location of the development and quickly track any changes to the submissions.
7. Leveraged investments in pillar technologies (e.g. POSSE, Livelink).
8. Opportunity for process redesign to streamline submission/circulation workflow.

Technical Staff:

1. Standard file formats and consistency is improved when submitting electronic files.
2. The Geomatics group is able to notify applicants immediately if submitted CAD drawings did not conform to City standards.
3. The Addressing group is able to provide addressing information to external partners quicker and also in electronic format (PDF).

External Partners:

1. City is able to submit updated and/or additional files to its customers electronically.
2. Addressing plans for proposed subdivisions are available quicker and electronically.
3. Standard file formats and consistency is improved when submitting electronic files.
4. Increased confidence that important documents are well-managed and tracked.

Project Success

ePlans provides the City of Calgary a robust method of measuring the cycle times not only of internal staff but the cycle time spent by measuring customer response time. Not only are cycle time measurements available but also quality measures to ensure that applicants are providing high quality plans and documents.

Automating the subdivision process, establishing business rules and associated metrics has led to a 50 per cent improvement in the cycle time for the Endorsement process. The Endorsement process has been documented from a workflow and business perspective, improving the transparency and understanding of the process from all sides. These metrics have allowed the City to work collaboratively with high volume applicants to improve training and streamline the process.

ePlans has provided a 24/7 application intake window. The applicant can now submit their application via the Internet from their own desktop, eliminating the need to commute and park downtown during office hours. Also, due to the increasing levels of development in Calgary, waiting times at the Development and Building Approvals Customer Service counter average 45 minutes to an hour or more. ePlans has eliminated the inconvenience of waiting in line by allowing customers to apply online at their convenience.

Source: Winning Submission for 2006 URISA Exemplary Systems In Government (ESIG) Award.

The process capacity improved by 50 per cent, allowing staff to cope with the very large increase in volumes experienced in the City in 2006.



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